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THE SHORT-EARED OWL IN SASKATCHEWAN

By WALTER A. GOELITZ

WITH ONE PHOTO

DURING the summer of 1917 I spent six weeks, from May 1 to June 13, sixteen miles south of Regina, the capital of Saskatchewan, working on a 1200-acre grain farm. In that region the land is very flat with not a tree or bush to break the horizon. The only irregularities to be seen upon the smooth prairie are the houses, located usually a mile or more apart, and the numerous large straw piles. Most of the land is now under cultivation, but scattered about are still some tracts of virgin prairie in lots of from a half section to two sections in extent. During the first half of my stay the soil was still wet and swampy from the melted snow, and the lower sections and shallow draws were covered with vast sheets of water, sometimes covering thousands of acres. Evaporation went on rather quickly because of the brisk winds which blew the greater part of the time.

I had very little time to scout after birds and nests, since my work began at 4:00 A. M. and lasted until from 7:30 to 9:00 P. M.; but on account of the long daylight hours I was able to spend a short time looking for nests in the evening, and of course on Sundays. Even so, the greater number of my finds were made while at work in the fields.

Short-eared Owls (*Asio flammeus*) were much in evidence, both upon the prairie and in the fields of wheat and oat stubble. If flushed during a bright day they would invariably flap away a few rods and then come back to settle near the place from which they started. On dark or cloudy days they would fly about for a longer time and even would hunt for food under such conditions. I remember watching an owl one day follow a dog about in a marshy part of a stubble field for nearly an hour. It did not have a nest in the vicinity, so the action need not have been a result of protective instincts. There is the possibility of it being simply curiosity, and again it may be that the owl

was watching for mice which the dog might scare up from the bunches of stubble and trash.

As nearly as I could tell from pellets found in the fields and about nests, the food consisted solely of mice. Of these there seemed to be enough to last for years to come, for while drilling or discing mice were nearly always in sight, scampering away from in front of the machines for dear life. No signs of birds were found in any of the pellets.

Until the present season my acquaintance with this owl has been in Illinois, and limited in that state to the brief period during the winter when the birds are to be found commonly in clumps of evergreen trees. I was anxious to find a nest and was correspondingly excited when I stumbled on the first one, on



Fig. 12. NEST AND EGGS OF SHORT-EARED OWL; SASKATCHEWAN, CANADA, MAY 19, 1917.

May 19. It might better be said that I rode over it, for I was discing in a 640-acre field of stubble with a six horse outfit when an owl suddenly flushed just in front of the horses, and I was so interested in watching the bird fly away that I did not notice the nest until it had been run over. Quickly I examined the nine eggs it contained, and found all but one in perfect condition, the one having a slight crack where a disc blade had grazed it. The nest was merely a hollow, lined with grass, stubble and a few downy owl feathers. Incubation in some of the eggs was about two-thirds advanced, while others were nearly fresh. I continued my work, and on the next day, a Sunday, I visited the spot again to take pictures (see fig. 12) and collect the eggs.

Two days later, May 22, I was drilling flax in another part of the same field, where it had not yet been disced. I was standing on the seed box and keeping a weather eye open for ducks or other birds to flush, when an owl flew up from beside the horses. A short search revealed the nest, containing seven fresh, pearl-like eggs. This nest varied little from the first one found, the main difference being a less amount of lining.

May 31 found me discing in another field of wheat stubble about a mile from that in which the first two nests were found. While driving back and forth across the field, which, by the way, was a mile long and a mile wide, I noticed a number of white objects scattered within a radius of three feet on ground already disced. Upon examination they proved to be owl eggs and only one of the six eggs found was damaged in the least. The nest, located by some white feathers, did not differ markedly from the others. The eggs were incubated one-half.

On Sunday, June 3, another workman on the farm told me of a nest he had noticed the day before. I immediately saddled a pony and rode out to have a look. On that part of the field to which I was directed we had burned off the stubble a week previous. All through the burnt part were small patches of stubble which had been too damp to burn, and it was in one of these that I saw the owl brooding on her nest and glaring at me with wide-open eyes. I rode within ten feet of the nest before she flew off and disclosed a set of seven eggs. Incubation was well along.

It was on June 4 that I found a third owl nest, or more precisely, the remains of a nest, in this same field. I was dragging the disced ground with a six-horse, spike-toothed harrow when I noticed some eggs disappearing under the machine. I managed to find two whole eggs and several shells scattered about, and one week-old owl nearly covered with soil. A nest was manufactured in short order and the owl installed. On the next trip down the field the old bird was seen brooding on her new nest as if nothing had happened.

Ravinia, Illinois, December 12, 1917.

NOTES ON THE NESTING HABITS OF THE WHITE-THROATED SWIFT IN COLORADO

By WM. C. BRADBURY

WITH SIX PHOTOS

AFTER the excellent article by Mr. Hanna on the White-throated Swift in the January, 1917, number of THE CONDOR, it might seem superfluous to chronicle my own observations, but the Editor has suggested these might prove interesting, if only for comparison or corroboration.

Early in June, 1916, Mr. J. D. Figgins, Director of the Colorado Museum of Natural History, returning from a mountain trip reported a number of White-throated Swifts (*Aeronautes melanoleucus*) about a promising nesting site near Hot Sulphur Springs, Grand County, in this state. After fully discussing the matter, I provided a quite complete collecting equipment for cliff work, including block and tackle, sailor swing outfit and accessories good for two hun-